



# What do introduction sections tell us about the intent of scholarly work: A contribution on contributions

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## ABSTRACT

The paper marks a rare empirical examination of the semantics of contribution claims in the introduction sections of journal articles. The framing of contribution claims is a significantly under-examined area of scholarly activity which underpins the methodical act of communicating the value of research to an audience. The paper presents a systematic review of 538 papers in the three leading industrial marketing journals, *Industrial Marketing Management*, the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* and the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* and uses a phased approach to categorize contribution claims made by authors in their introductions. The paper identifies four main categories of contribution, defined as Incremental, revelatory, replicatory and consolidatory – proposing sub-categorizations within them, and reports on the proportionality of these strategies in the sample whilst capturing the semantic games played by authors in pursuit of these claims. Findings are of interest to industrial marketers but the conceptual framework and systematic methods presented in the paper are offered as transferable to any discipline or body of work, and therefore have broader disciplinary appeal. Findings are of interest to authors, reviewers and editors in coalescing fragmented understanding of contribution strategies into a coherent framework for action.

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines the semantic strategies used by scholars in claiming academic contributions in the field of industrial marketing. Contribution is a fluid term, its semantic implications often casting a shadow over doctoral examinations or decisions of whether, or whether *not*, to accept a paper for publication. But, as a research student, publishing academic or reviewer, clear guidance as to what amounts to a contribution is, at best, fragmented and no broad and comprehensive review and analysis seems to have been performed on this topic in any discipline. Ladik and Stewart (2008:157) note that despite the frequency of the question – what is a contribution? – being posed, “it has seldom been directly addressed in print.” We adopt a position in this paper that a contribution strategy is a deliberate form of rhetorical approach used by authors to communicate the distinctive value of their written works to an audience. Currently, guidance as to the different contribution strategies is fragmented, largely conceptual and conflates the intentionality of authors at the time of writing with the post-

rationalization of measures of “impact” at some point in time after publication. We are concerned here with author intentionality in making contribution claims as conscious “rhetorical acts” (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997:1028). Our broad aims are therefore to first, develop an analytically generalizable framework for examining the intentional contribution strategies of authors in any discipline and to deploy it to present specific conclusions for industrial marketing scholarship; and second, provide exemplars of the rhetorical acts of authors in this discipline as a guide to future scholarship in any discipline. Our contribution here is therefore to academic scholarship – we aim to contribute on the subject of contributions itself, providing a performative framework useful for scholars, research students, editors and reviewers.

The procedures and analysis reported here unfold in three phases. In the first phase, papers on the subject of scientific contributions that identify the different strategies that have been used (we refer to these as *known* strategies), are identified and reviewed. In short, we start with *what is known* about making a contribution. We identify a lack of

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consolidated guidance available as to different known contribution strategies. Currently, advice is fragmented across different papers in different disciplines. A first product of the analysis is therefore a comprehensive framework, which consolidates what is known and which will be of interest to scholars in any discipline. In order to test the conceptual framework developed in phase 1, a second phase of the analysis was undertaken and is presented through a systematic review of a contemporary three-year survey of three leading academic journals. Our approach is systematic, in that we seek to uncover different types of contributions made in research papers and do so by proceeding through a series of steps in which semantic codes were developed, and papers classified against them (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006). The sample used to develop the analysis is substantial, based on the consideration of 538 papers in the three highest ranked industrial marketing journals (based on the [Chartered Association of Business School \(CABS\) listing, 2015](#)), *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM), the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) and the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* (JBBM).

The purpose of this survey was to capture the rhetorical acts of authors and to associate them with the contribution strategies found in phase 1. To our knowledge, only one systematic review has been performed on the subject of contribution claims in any discipline, that being project management (Hallgren, 2012). Our approach allowed for the identification of the relative use of strategies, combinations of strategies, and which strategies are most relied upon as free-standing strategies. In the first two phases, we therefore present an abductive analysis – one of best fit between strategies observed by the researchers being used by authors in the survey, and “known” contribution strategies. Throughout, we capture and present exemplars of the semantics deployed in each of these strategies. We believe we are the first to provide such an exposition and feel this will be helpful to scholars. Moreover, by also identifying the limited use of certain strategies, further discussion of potential future use of these strategies is advanced in the concluding section. A third phase of research amounted to a confirmatory phase, which explored whether there are other possible contribution strategies being used by authors that are not “known” – and which fall outside the parameters identified in phase 1. The third phase of research therefore moves from an abductive to an inductive logic and attempts to mitigate against coding bias and contradictions between introduction sections and the body of the papers analysed.

We present our methods in three parts, in conjunction with the three phases of analysis. Implicit in the structure of most formulaic papers is that a literature review is not methodical and therefore should precede an exposition of methods in the flow of a paper. However, we adopt a non-formulaic structure (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013) in which the approach to literature reviewing is indeed methodical, and which therefore requires explanation before exposition. Instead of what would usually be one methods section, the development of this paper is in three phases, with different methodological techniques attached to each phase. In each section, we therefore present and discuss the findings from the three phases along with the methodological implications.

## 2. Phase one: development of a conceptual framework – what is “known” about making a contribution?

Our first objective is to consolidate the papers on the subject of scientific contributions and identify the different strategies that are proposed to have been used – we refer to these as “known” strategies. Our aim in this section is to develop a conceptual framework identifying known strategies as a first stage in empirically exploring the rhetoric games of authors. We move in this section to identify and discuss these *known* contribution strategies.

### 2.1. Methods used in phase one

This phase identifies what is known on the subject of making a

contribution. This first phase of our analysis is therefore a traditional review of the literature on the subject of academic contributions. A difficulty in performing a “systematic” review of papers on contributions is that the search term, “contribution” identifies every paper claiming to make one. This ubiquity of the term prevents confidence in an exhaustive systematic digital search being made. Instead, having identified key literatures, we used “cited in” and “cited by” searches from key journals to establish the extent of the literature. Thus, we characterize our approach as abductive, using multiple phases, as no guarantee of exhaustiveness can be made in relation to phase 1 alone. We did not limit the search to any particular disciplinary area.

### 2.2. Phase one findings

An early observation is that journal editors write much of this discourse. However, a small number of substantive (but conceptual) discussions of contribution have been made – mostly in the last 10 years. We start with a discussion of practical and theoretical contributions.

#### 2.2.1. A brief word on contributions to practice

A key tension between theoretical and practical contributions has been explored as the rigor-relevance gap, both in marketing (Baraldi, La Rocca, & Perna, 2014; Brennan, Canning, & McDowell, 2014; Gummesson, 2014) and in the broader management literature (Fincham & Clark, 2009; Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Kieser & Leiner, 2009). One solution proposed by Kieser and Leiner (2009) is that academics should base their contributions not on past research, but on practical problems – and this argument would seem to suggest that a clear statement of this intent should appear in the introductions of papers. Hallgren (2012) proposes *practical application* as a specific category of contribution. This is along the lines of *basic and applied* research in the hard sciences. However, beyond this work, there seems to be little discussion of how authors form their research questions and position their contribution strategies in the introductions to their papers. Cuervo-Cazurra, Caligiuri, Andresson, and Brannen (2013:285) and Doh (2010:98) both suggest that practical implications are often included only as “afterthoughts” in papers as a token closing paragraph. Indeed, the three journals utilized in this research ask authors to include a section on managerial application as part of the article. The methods undertaken in this analysis – to explore contribution claims through introduction paragraphs, do not therefore lend themselves well to the examination of practice based problems in this paper and therefore the subject of contributions to practice lies outside the scope of this paper.

#### 2.2.2. Contributions to theory

We are concerned primarily with theoretical contributions. There are several perspectives on what constitutes a theoretical contribution. These include an assessment of *interestingness* (Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006), *utility* (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) *originality* and *value* (Bergh, 2003) and being something which “adds, embellishes or creates something beyond what is already known” (Ladik & Stewart, 2008:157). However, there is a danger in a measure of interestingness that entertainment value is also implied. Seemingly responding to this concern, Corley and Gioia (2011:11) speak of “advancing knowledge in a way that is deemed to have utility or usefulness for some purpose.” These comments introduce a consideration of *progress* into a discussion of contribution. Hazen (2016) more specifically speaks of *building* or *extending* theory. In these senses, a contribution is interesting because it provides utility, usefulness or value to at least one audience whose knowledge is advanced by considering an argument or the findings of a study. A further nuance in the discussion is that of *magnitude* – a consideration that contributions are not all equally utilitarian, useful or valuable. Indeed, a single work may contain a substantial breakthrough in thinking, and a body consisting of several pieces of work may contain a cumulatively lesser contribution than in a single paper. Ladik and

Stewart (2008) offer an eight-point spectrum of contribution types from straight replication to the development of a new theory. However, we propose that the magnitude of the contribution can only be post-rationalized, and indeed a loaded element in this spectrum to which we offer challenge in this paper is that a replication of an existing study is a lesser form of contribution. A second implicit assumption of such a spectrum is that each paper contains *one*, rather than a *combination*, of contribution strategies within a paper.

We believe that scientific utility, in contrast to practical utility, should denote the ways in which the proposed contribution is favourably juxtaposed or indeed contraposed to what is already theoretically known. The body of work on contributions suggests that there are several strategies to articulating contributions and we explore each of these in turn in the following sections.

### 2.2.3. Incremental contributions

A contribution predicated on *incremental* originality is based on a traditional *gap spotting* approach to reviewing literature (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Hallgren, 2012; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Many commentators observe this incremental approach to be the dominant mode of a publishing strategy (e.g. Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). Tadajewski and Hewer (2011:450) suggest that “embedding your research within the existing literature is a must and allows editors, reviewers, and readers to orient themselves.” Alvesson and Gabriel (2013:248) refer to this approach as “a missing brick in a wall that the researcher diligently provides.” However, a gap may exist because there is no value in filling it (Tadajewski & Hewer, 2011). Indeed, there seems little value in building a bridge across a river no one wants to cross; therefore, a gap spotting strategy must be coupled to an assessment of *utility* in filling the identified gap.

Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) discuss different sub-strategies within the broader strategy of gap-spotting. The first sub-strategy they identify is *confusion* spotting. Confusion exists where a collection of published papers within a theme fail to reach concord on a subject. An author's approach here would seem to be to attempt to rationalize previously published results. A second strategy is *neglect* – an intent to focus on neglected or under-researched areas, in which *neglect* could apply to theories, constructs or methodologies, but could also refer to areas where papers are substantially conceptual rather than empirical (Hallgren, 2012). A third approach is the gap offered by identifying a *new application* or context for an existing theory. An author's approach here would seem to be to identify an explored “thing” that through extension and application to an unexplored “thing” will further understanding in some way. However, Hazen (2016) emphasizes that a new context is not a contribution, and that a contribution must be extracted from an extension from an old to a new context in order to make it interesting to a wider audience. Examples of too narrow contexts are findings that are too industry or firm specific (Hazen, 2016). An incremental contribution must therefore be pitched and measured against existing knowledge, and its value and importance defended as showing progress over what is currently known. However, a concern of Alvesson and Sandberg (2013:131) is that a gap-spotting approach demonstrates only “mild criticality.”

We therefore define a meta-category of *incremental* contribution, and propose three sub-categories, of *neglect*, *confusion* and *new context*.

We next move to examining contributions, which contain ostensibly greater levels of criticality.

### 2.2.4. Revelatory contributions and challenging assumptions

There is much comment in the reviewed papers that gap-spotting is the dominant mode of making a contribution. A problem in following an alternative to a gap-spotting approach is the risk involved from the author's perspective in getting the paper accepted for publication. The problem of pursuing an alternative contribution is succinctly discussed by Hunt (1994:15):

“Marketing reviewers react quite negatively when a manuscript offers a genuinely original contribution to knowledge. Criticisms such as “where is the precedent?” and “where is the authority?” are, in my experience, disproportionately prominent in reviews by marketing referees. [...]. Marketers making genuinely original contributions to knowledge do so at their peril.”

Implicit in this comment is that originality may be amplified in other than gap spotting terms. Hunt's caution has been echoed more recently by Barney (2018) when he speaks of the problems of a journal review process handling both *revolutionary* science papers and *normal* science papers. He speaks of the difficulty of editors and reviewers anticipating and therefore correctly orientating themselves to the type of paper they are handling in order to assess it from the appropriate standpoint. Barney seems to suggest that a different approach to the handling of normal science and revolutionary science papers must be considered. It would seem to us imperative therefore that an author flags clearly the type of paper they are submitting. Guidance as to how to rhetorically differentiate these papers seems limited.

Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) further note that consensus challenging research tends to be better recognized and cited, so the dominance of incremental strategies is not easily explained in terms of the magnitude of the contribution. Hunt's comment above clearly points to the comfort many reviewers have with incremental contributions (where they have a feeling of familiarity and comfort) and the discomfort they have with other strategies (where they have little, if any, experience). Boer, Holweg, Kilduff, Pagell, Schmenner, and Voss (2015:1244) also suggest that attempting a consensus challenging posture “may prove difficult to publish given that the theory claim is based on criticizing the very people who are likely to review the paper.” Hence, there seems to be an important contradistinction between retrospective assessments of the magnitude of a contribution, and the intentionality of the author.

Corley and Gioia (2011:201) helpfully juxtapose *incremental* (normal science) contribution with *revelatory* (revolutionary science) contribution, which rests “in the idea that contribution arises when theory *reveals* what we otherwise had not seen, known, or conceived” [emphasis added]. Other authors note that gap spotting and a subsequent focus on methodological rigor downplay the importance of imagination, conceptual development and speculative thought (Weick, 1989) and equally reduce the chance of unexpected, challenging and surprising results (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). Hence, there seems to be some disparity between the present and future value of contributions, and their association with past knowledge. Alvesson and Sandberg (2011:250) perceive the risk that, due to the dominance of gap spotting

**Table 1**  
Types of problematization strategies:

| A typology of assumptions open for challenge through problematization |  |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| In House  | Root metaphor  | Paradigm  | Ideology  | Field  |
| Assumptions that exist within a specific school of thought            | Broader images of a particular subject matter underlying existing literature | Ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions underlying existing literature | Political-moral and gender related assumptions underlying existing literature | Assumptions about a specific subject matter that are shared across different theoretical schools |

Source: (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011:260).

approaches, authors may be inclined to “downplay or conceal a strong contribution by dressing it up in gap-spotting rhetoric.” Understanding the semantics of making claims for revelatory contributions at the time of their writing seem to be a matter of some importance, and, if handled poorly, can seem (in the views of most of the authors of the literature reviewed) to prevent potentially significant contributions from being published.

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) speak of a strategy for attaining a revelatory contribution that they refer to as *problematization*. The crux of this strategy is to challenge the underlying assumptions or the consensus in a body of work (Grant & Pollock, 2011). Johnson (2003) also offers the term of *rhetorical interestingness* where, rather than the interlocutor making an alternative assumption, the assumption in a body of work is opposed. A consensus of authors advocate this strategy as being able to identify the underlying assumptions, expose them and articulate the challenge being offered to the underlying assumptions in a way that is meaningful to the audience of the paper. Where assumptions are implicit, then logically an author must make explicit those assumptions as part of the rhetorical act. Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) offer a number of types of assumptions which can be challenged (Table 1).

A problematization strategy can further be distinguished from a gap spotting strategy by its *deliberateness*. In this sense, a problematization strategy is by definition contained in the deliberate rhetorical act at the time of writing which must articulate existing assumptions and offer challenge to them. These deliberate rhetorical acts have as yet received very limited attention by scholars.

#### 2.2.5. Revelatory contributions and combining lenses

Clark and Wright (2009:7) note that multi-disciplinary research may be a “more fruitful means to generate significant insights than seeking to find gaps in existing theories.” Interdisciplinary research focuses on the integration and combination of concepts from multiple disciplines in a theoretical contribution (Cheng, Henisz, Roth, & Swaminathan, 2009). Oswick, Fleming, and Hanlon (2011) make a distinction between the wholesale importation of theory from one discipline into another – *theory borrowing* – and the combination of concepts and constructs from two or more disciplinary areas – *theory blending*. Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011) suggest that in addition to blending or borrowing different bodies of literature, a second competing tension after challenging the underlying assumptions of the body of works being drawn upon is the proximity of the theoretical lenses that a scholar seeks to combine. They suggest that a contribution based on challenging proximate assumptions is more difficult for an author to make, as there can seem little value in challenging broadly compatible assumptions. More value can be discerned when those close areas of research have at least incompatible assumptions. However, this type of contribution is more difficult to articulate clearly. As Johnson (2003) suggests, this strategy is rhetorically interesting, so it is hardly surprising that it is couched in more complex terminology. Indicative terms include “contest,” “contrast,” “challenge,” and “alternative.” Likewise, Johnson (2003) and Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011) discuss how the difficulties in pursuing this contribution strategy are tied up with semantics, particularly in the way an underlying assumption is surfaced and then challenged. It seems somewhat surprising, therefore, that so little attention has been devoted to how authors enact this approach. Much of the discussion within the literature reviewed is focused on the magnitude of the contributions made, but this magnitude can only be retrospectively assessed. For such assumption challenging research to reach print, perhaps through the gatekeeping of orthodox assumptions, authors must perform a rhetorical act, and it is this act that interests us.

We therefore define a meta-category of *revelatory* contributions, and propose two sub-categories of, *assumption challenging* and *using multiple lenses*. We move next to consider replicatory contributions that some authors see as a limited contribution in a spectrum of magnitude (Ladik & Stewart, 2008).

#### 2.2.6. Replicatory contributions

Having examined a revelatory contribution as one measure of an interesting contribution, we therefore choose to consider replication as a further source of contribution, and one that is often overlooked in the social sciences, according to many eminent commentators (Evanschitzky & Armstrong, 2013; Honig, Lampel, Siegel, & Drnevich, 2014; Hubbard & Lindsay, 2013; Hubbard, Vetter, & Little, 1998; Hunter, 2001; Uncles & Kwok, 2013). However, in considering this strategy it is fair to ask the question – is originality synonymous with advancing knowledge? By merely extending generalizability, can an argument for a contribution be made? Hubbard and Armstrong (1994:236) define replication as:

“...a duplication of a previously published empirical study that is concerned with assessing whether similar findings can be obtained upon repeating the study.”

Wright (2015:766) quite disparagingly suggests that “no top-tier journal can afford to waste valuable space on papers that simply reiterate what the field already knows.” Similar to Ladik and Stewart (2008), Wright seems to view replications as being a low magnitude contribution. However, in contrast to these views, a number of authors have discussed the importance of verification (i.e. replication) studies in the physical sciences (Easley, Madden, & Gray, 2013; Goldsby & Autry, 2011). Evanschitzky and Armstrong (2013:1407) suggest that:

“If medicine used the same practice, researchers might test many treatments and occasionally discover some of them useful by chance. Teachers should be wary of including the findings of one-off studies in their curricula, and researchers need to recognize that such findings rest on a weak foundation.”

We further note the comments of Hunter (2001:149) in the *Journal of Consumer Research* who strongly advocates the need for “replication studies of all types and we need many such replications for each study.” Unlike the previously outlined contribution strategies, the purpose of replication is to confirm.

Uncles and Kwok (2013) utilize Brinberg and McGrath's (1995) framework to illustrate three types of replication studies and discuss three aspects of research design: *conceptual* (C), *methodological* (M) and *substantive* (S). The first type of replication they discuss is exact replication where C, M and S remain constant. Hunter (2001) refers to this as *statistical* replication. Statistical replication involves drawing the same correlations between the same variables in the same way, using the same procedures with a different sample from the same population. Uncles and Kwok (2013) refer to a second kind of replication as *close* replication where a slight variation is allowed in C, M or S. Hunter (2001) refers to such a type of close replication as *scientific* replication – where the sample frames should be broadly representative in terms of the questions asked. Uncles and Kwok (2013) mention a third category of replication as being *differentiated* replication, where variances in C, M and/or S are deliberately designed to establish the generalization of a previous study. For example, replicating a study in an industry, country, culture or environment different from those of the original study. This category has also been titled *quasi-replication* (Bettis, Helfat, & Shaver, 2016). Hunter (2001) refers to this type of study as being concerned with *conceptual* replication.

We therefore define a meta-category of *replicatory* contributions, and propose three sub-categories of, *exact*, *close* and *differentiated* replication strategies. We turn finally in this section to intentional literature review articles.

#### 2.2.7. Consolidatory contributions

Hallgren (2012) adds in a further category of research question as a *research overview*. However, we choose here to adopt the term *consolidatory* contribution to refer to dedicated literature review papers of scholarly work in the field that advance knowledge in some way, often referred to as a state-of-the-art paper. There are three main types of



literature reviews. The first, and most common, is a *narrative* review (also known as a traditional or conventional review) and involves conceptually presenting literature in a subjective manner. The second type is a *systematic* review, in which greater objectivity is required because results are provided which can be generalized, and indeed replicated to some extent. As an already established type of literature review in the medical fields (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003), systematic reviews in business research and its sub-fields have relatively recently been recognized and have attracted increasing attention (Denyer & Neely, 2004). Systematic reviews can be presented qualitatively (via coding procedures and a series of themes), quantitatively or by using mixed methods.

The quantitative approach lends itself to the third form of literature review; meta-analysis, which focusses on testing hypotheses and aggregating and comparing the empirical findings from different studies, as well as inspecting the sampling instruments used in each case (Geyskens, Steenkamp, & Kumar, 1999). As meta-analysis findings are argued to be more generalizable, they are becoming increasingly popular in marketing (Saeed, Yousafzai, Paladino, & De Luca, 2015). They have been advocated as a means of achieving generalization of common concepts and constructs as a variation of replicatory contribution (Bettis et al., 2016), for example, when evaluating the antecedents behind a new product's success, or when investigating the influence of market orientation on firm performance (Ellis, 2006). Unlike traditional reviews, meta-analyses are more objective, as they are subject to statistical tests (Geyskens et al., 1999) and can “directly examine the influence of various study design characteristics” (Ellis, 2006:3) that may sway study hypotheses. For instance, a single empirical study may not readily identify relationships between multiple variables, whereas by drawing studies together and contrasting the sampling instruments

used, meta-analyses permit the evaluation of such sampling instruments (see Grinstead, 2008 for a more detailed overview of meta-analysis procedures). Meta-analyses can also reduce the likelihood of study findings occurring by chance and promote a more transparent methodology, because they are able to pinpoint the magnitude of an effect (e.g. sampling variable) and also the statistical significance of study findings (Frank, 2001).

Within the above literature review types, some validity concerns arise, such as the thoroughness of the review, how well the literature review methodology is documented and also the selection criteria of studies used (Tranfield et al., 2003). The focus of procedural aspects are greater in systematic approaches and when using meta-analysis. According to Denyer and Tranfield (2006), interpretivist authors are apt to criticize the traditions of a systematic approach as this kind of review conforms to positivist assumptions. However, literature review papers provide important input and theoretical lucidity by conceptualising previous work and advancing knowledge, as well as addressing research gaps that can inform future research. We therefore define a final meta-category of *consolidatory* contributions, and propose three sub-categories of, *systematic*, *traditional* and *meta-analysis*.

#### 2.2.8. Conceptual framework

The first of our broad aims for the paper was to develop a conceptual framework, holding the possibility of analytical generalizability to any discipline. Fig. 1 is a first step towards the development of such a framework. The framework is therefore a representation of ‘known’ strategies – that is, it provides a summary of existing discussions in current literature as to what different rhetorical contribution strategies have been identified for making a scientific contribution. We identify four meta-categories and eleven sub-categories of strategies for making



Fig. 1. Conceptual model: dimensions of contribution in industrial marketing.

**Table 2**  
Allocation of sub-categories to main categories.

| Type 2.1: neglect | Type 2.2: confusion | Type 2.3: new context | Main category count (type 2: incremental) |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Y                 |                     |                       | 1 occurrence                              |
|                   | Y                   |                       | 1 occurrence                              |
|                   |                     | Y                     | 1 occurrence                              |
|                   | Y                   | Y                     | 1 occurrence                              |
| Y                 | Y                   |                       | 1 occurrence                              |
| Y                 |                     | Y                     | 1 occurrence                              |
| Y                 | Y                   | Y                     | 1 occurrence                              |

a contribution claim. As a product of a first step, derived inductively from the best literature available, the framework provides a foundation for further deductive coding against a sample of papers. The combination of phases therefore is best characterized as abductive, in that it sequentially seeks a best fit between data and evidence.

The framework has four broad categories and a series of sub-categories developed from the preceding analysis and discussion. Each contribution can be split between mutually exclusive conceptual (only) and empirical (non-bibliographic), hence they appear at the centre of the model. This inclusion allows for further consideration as to which types of contribution strategy are used relative to whether a paper is conceptual or empirical, a consideration here for us was whether revelatory contributions tend to be made in conceptual contributions rather than empirical ones.

### 3. Allocating papers to the conceptual framework

#### 3.1. Phase two methods

The second phase of the analysis was to conduct a systematic review of a body of work, in this case, in the field of industrial marketing management. The choice of this sub-discipline is due to the advantage offered by the fact that a substantial body of its output is contained within three dedicated journals ranked as 2\* or above on the Association of Business Schools ranking list ([Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2015](#)). The methods used to operationalize the framework consist of a systematic review examining the introductions and abstracts of three years output of papers (2012–2014) published in IMM, JBIM and JBBM. While other articles considering B2B and industrial marketing appear in more general marketing and indeed management journals, the use of the three leading journals allows for a coherent frame to be set for the sample; the use of the three most highly regarded and ranked journals offers guarantee of quality in review and authorship. We focus on the early, introductory sections and abstracts of papers, as the introduction provides the “interpretive frame that shapes how reviewers read a manuscript during the review process” ([Grant & Pollock, 2011:873](#)). [Locke and Golden-Biddle \(1997:1027\)](#) also suggest that, “in a formal publication, opportunities for contribution are developed in its introductory paragraphs and pages.” This approach is also consistent with the study by [Johnson \(2003\)](#), who sees abstracts and introductions as key in establishing the ‘rhetorical positioning’ of a paper. The choice of three recent years of journal articles was motivated by our aim to understand the contemporary state of the art in contribution strategies. The use of three *consecutive* years of papers from three different journals is to even out the revolving tastes of academic reviewers.

The choice of research methods has two underlying justifications, to provide a procedure through which to capture and classify the language used by authors in framing their contribution rhetoric, and then to use that to abductively allocate semantics to the categories of contribution outlined in [Fig. 1](#). The approach was informed by the work of [Evanschitzky, Baumgarth, Hubbard, and Armstrong \(2007\)](#), who performed a systematic review of replication studies in the management

disciplines, by [Locke and Golden-Biddle's \(1997\)](#) grounded approach to examining the rhetoric of contribution statements, and by [Hallgren's \(2012\)](#) review of research questions in the project management discipline.

Each of the 538 articles were opened in their electronic form and the introduction sections and abstracts of the papers examined. Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were used to record the findings. Initially, 100 articles were examined by the lead researcher and the semantics thought to be associated with each category were identified. A second pass was then made at these first 100 papers by the lead researcher, before passing these semantics as codes for use by the other researchers. Three members of the research team took one year each of the sample. Each researcher examined the semantics of the contribution in each paper and classified the claims made with eleven non-mutually exclusive categories of contribution, from [Fig. 1](#). Those papers that could not be coded at first pass were classified as ‘outliers.’ These outliers were analysed in phase 3, reported below. We found early in the study that while some contribution claims were ‘free-standing’ – that is where the contribution was predicated on a single of the eleven sub contribution strategies – others could be coded to several of the strategies – that is, coded to more than one of the eleven sub-strategies and indeed to more than one of the four meta-strategies. The maximum number of sub-categories we found in a single paper was four of the eleven categories. The issue of non-mutually exclusive categories is therefore an issue of some significance, which we will return to.

#### 3.2. Phase two findings

The purpose of this phase of research was to identify the rhetorical acts used by scholars to further each contribution strategy and to code occurrences of each of the eleven elements of [Fig. 1](#). Our aim in this phase of research was to establish [Fig. 1](#) as an appropriate catch-all framework for assessing contributions in a body of work. Our first conclusion is that the deductive framework was sound, in that we were able to categorize 91% (488) of contribution statements in the 538 papers at a first pass, leaving 9% (50) which we have classified as outliers (analysed in [Section 5.1](#)). We found that the 538 (including outlier) papers were split between empirical (471–88%) and conceptual (67–12%).

Taking the 488 papers that were codeable at first pass, we first sought to demonstrate the relative occurrence of the eleven sub-categories. Each coder identified the occurrence of one of these categories in a single paper. However, we were interested in the relative occurrence of the eleven sub-strategies across the four meta-strategies. The problem here is that a coding occurrence to one of the sub-strategies equates to one coding occurrence to the meta-strategies; and one occurrence to two or three of the sub-strategies also equates to one occurrence of the meta-strategies. Given the problem of non-mutually exclusive occurrence of the sub-strategies, in order to aggregate the coding of the sub-strategies up to the meta-strategies, attention had to be paid to some methodological considerations that we need to briefly explain. Where a paper was coded as having neglect, confusion, and new context strategies in it, this was aggregated as one occurrence of a gap-spotting strategy (given that all three sub-categories are within the same main category – not three occurrences by adding the sum of columns). As illustrated in [Table 2](#), using category two as an example, seven search combinations were sought using the Excel advanced filter function. An occurrence of any of these seven combinations was counted as one occurrence of the main category. This was repeated for the remaining three revelatory, replicatory and consolidatory main categories.

In [Fig. 2](#), we present the overall counts and percentages for categories and sub-categories, and the occurrence of free-standing strategies. We discuss the implications of these findings in the following sections.

The results broadly confirm the dominance of *incremental*

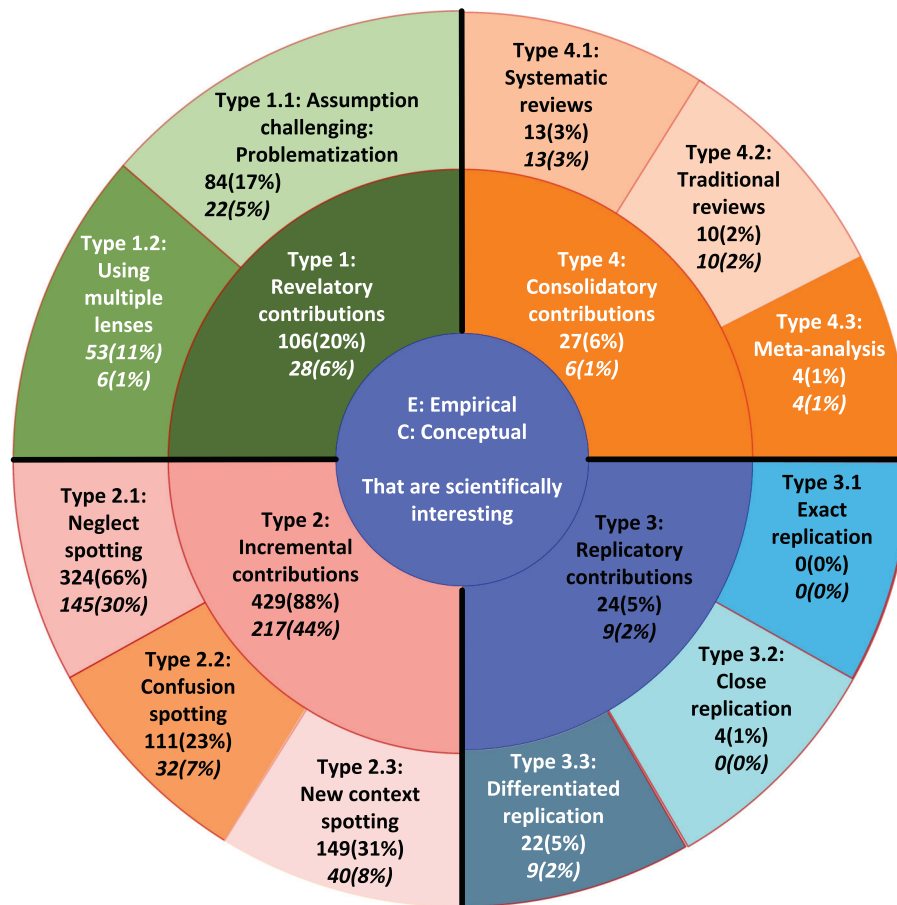


Fig. 2. Results of phase two analysis including counts and percentages.

Key: First number and percentage: Papers containing this strategy.

Second number (*in italics*): Papers containing this strategy as a free-standing strategy.

$N = 488$ .

contribution strategies, which are evident in 88% of the sample. What seems outwardly encouraging for Industrial Marketing (IM) scholarship is that 20% of papers contain a *revelatory* contribution. We identify 6% of papers in the sample, which we classify as containing *consolidatory* (Type four) contributions. Only 5% of papers include a replicatory contribution. We next examine each contribution type in more detail.

### 3.2.1. Incremental contributions

It is quite apparent that incremental contribution is the dominant strategy by authors in their introductions/abstracts, with 88% of the papers examined containing claims for an incremental contribution based on traditional gap spotting strategies. More telling, perhaps, is that in 217 papers (44% of the sampled papers), authors were confident to rely on an incremental strategy as a free-standing strategy, without seeking any other type of contribution. This contrasts to the next most prevalent of the main strategies being used as a free-standing strategy, revelatory, which appears in isolation from any other strategies in 28 papers (6% of the sample). Of the incremental sub strategies, Type 2.1, neglect, was by far the dominant mode, appearing as a free-standing strategy in 145 papers (30% of the sampled papers) compared to the next most prevalent, which was Type 2.3, new context, which is seen as a discreet strategy in 40 papers (8% of the sample). Industrial Marketing scholars seem to identify more areas of neglect than confusion, (Type 2.2), which appears as a free-standing strategy in 32 papers (or 7% of the sample).

These findings confirm the arguments from the literature as to the dominant mode of inquiry being incremental (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Hallgren, 2012; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011), but we offer what

Table 3

Semantics used by authors in neglect spotting strategies.

|  |  |                                     |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| "Neglect"  | "First time/look"                              | "Lack of focus"                     |
| "Rare"   | "First study"                                  | "In its infancy"                    |
| "Poor reporting"   | "Not attempted"                                | "No studies"                        |
| "Not defined/tested/<br>examined"                            | "Little understood"                            | "Not yet specified"                 |
| "Scarce"   | "Little written"                               | "Yet to be uncovered"               |
| "Lack of empirical insight/<br>mostly conceptual to<br>date" | "Only identified a [low<br>number] of studies" | "Only just begun"                   |
| "Ignored/ignores"  | "Paucity"                                      | "Overlooks"                         |
| "Have not been addressed"                                    | "Lack of research"                             | "Relatively little<br>attention"    |
| "Relatively unexplored"                                      | "Dearth"                                       | "Underutilized"                     |
| "Scant"  | "Still know very little"                       | "Not explored"                      |
| "Understudied"   | "Yet to uncover"                               | "Still lacking/lacks"               |
| "Little guidance"  | "Research largely<br>silent"                   | "Limited consideration"             |
| "Unanswered question"  | "Only scratch the<br>surface"                  | "Unrealized<br>opportunity"         |
| "Have paid less attention"                                   | "Paid little attention"                        | "Insufficiently<br>acknowledged"    |
| "Does not show"  | "Absence of work"                              | "Sparse"                            |
| "Shortage of research"                                       | "Little/limited<br>evidence/work"              | "Shortfall"                         |
| "Gone unnoticed"   | "Unlike previous<br>studies"                   | "Needs to be elaborated<br>further" |
| "Missing/missed"   | "Not evident"                                  | "Lacuna"                            |
| "Only a few exceptions"                                      | "Non-existent"                                 | "Not found"                         |

**Table 4**  
Semantics used by authors in confusion spotting strategies.

|  |  |                                   |  |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| “Clarify”                              | “Underdeveloped”                             | “Further clarification”           | “Seek deeper understanding”              |
| “Poor understanding”                   | “Fragmented”                                 | “Not firmly established”          | “Modest support”                         |
| “More complete understanding [needed]” | “Requires further development/investigation” | “Conflicting evidence/views”      | “Dispute/disputed”                       |
| “Argument”                             | “Controversy/controversial”                  | “Contradiction/contradictory”     | “At odds with”                           |
| “Not fully understood”                 | “Inconclusive”                               | “Not explored systematically”     | “Disparity”                              |
| “Ongoing debate”                       | “Lack of clarity”                            | “Remains unclear”                 | “Few studies address”                    |
| “Need for deeper understanding”        | “Whilst some studies...others..”             | “Not sufficiently conceptualised” | “Contradictory or inconsistent findings” |
| “Past studies mistakenly...”           | “Increasing concern”                         | “Do not agree”                    | “Mixed findings”                         |
| “Inadequately explained”               | “Inconsistency”                              | “Limited/no agreement             | “Literature is divided”                  |

**Table 5**  
Semantics used by the authors in new context spotting strategies.

|   |                                   |                                    |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| “From a different side of a dyad”             | “Extensions of earlier work”      | “Compliments previous studies”     |
| “Problem from a different agents perspective” | “Change of focus”                 | “Not been systematically examined” |
| “Different point of view”                     | “Different paradigm”              | “Extends framework”                |
| “Compliments”                                 | “Stretches theory”                | “Extend extant research”           |
| “Extends understanding”                       | “Patterns new to existing theory” |                                    |

we think is the first break down of sub-strategy types and comparison between incremental and revelatory strategies in any body of academic endeavor. We find neglect spotting to be the most used contribution sub-category, both in conjunction with other strategies and as a free-standing strategy in isolation from other strategies.

We feel a high degree of comfort in identifying neglect spotting strategies, as a missing ‘something’ and the semantics seem quite consistent across the 429 (88%) papers in which incremental contributions are identified. We feel able to draw a distinction between *neglect* and *confusion* strategies based on semantics captured in the study, suggesting that confusion spotting denotes the existence of ‘something’ in the literature, but that ‘something’ is insufficient or inadequate in some way. We present the terms we have associated with a neglect spotting strategy in Table 3.

**3.2.1.1. Neglect spotting.** Coding this category proved quite straightforward, with all four coders finding substantial agreement in their analysis of the papers. Table 3 contains the most commonly used terms. Our approach was to identify these terms inductively and then use them deductively to identify further occurrences of the same strategy.

**3.2.1.2. Confusion spotting.** Confusion was also a relatively easy category to classify (Table 4). Early in the systematic review, the distinction between confusion and neglect emerged in semantics that

denoted some substantive work being acknowledged by the author, with dissatisfaction being evident into the veracity of the state of cumulative knowledge.

**3.2.1.3. New context.** Coding new context strategies proved more problematic than for the previous two incremental contribution types. Unlike with the first two sub-categories, coding by the four researchers exposed some disagreement between them. The counts and percentages should therefore be taken with caution and we will return to examine new context strategies alongside differentiated replication later in the paper. Table 5 offers a summary of the new context spotting semantics that we identified in phase 2 of the analysis.

However, many of the contributions we have allocated to this category have somewhat more nuanced claims. We have therefore selected and present in Table 6, a series of exemplar statements which indicate what we feel are contributions based on new context spotting strategies which identify the *extended* element (i.e., theory, concept, activity) in the semantics, and further attempt to better identify the *context* to which such extension relates.

We have therefore chosen to more closely associate a *new context* strategy with extensions of ‘something’ to a new context than that discussed by Sandberg and Alvesson (2011), who do not elaborate greatly on what they refer to as a new context strategy. Hazen's (2016) view is that context alone is not enough, however, given that we coded forty papers in which new context was a free-standing strategy, we seem able to conclude that this approach is being confidently used by a good number of scholars. Hazen (2016) further seems to caution against an extension of theory to a new geographic context (e.g. region or country). A cross-check confirms that none of the 40 free-standing contributions rely on this form of geographic extension. If geographic extension does appear as a new context, it is in conjunction with other contribution strategies. In Table 5, the semantics we report could also be discussed as *differentiated replication*, and, indeed, this is where the disagreement between coders occurred – we will return to further consider this disparity later in the paper.

**Table 6**  
Table of exemplars for new context strategy contribution.

| Authors  | Semantics of the contribution claim  | Extension of                                       | To context of   |
|--|--|--|---|
| Turkulainen, Kujala, Artto, and Levitt (2013:224). | “Although the arguments of the information processing model have been widely applied by scholars in different fields [...] they have not been elaborated in the context of integration of sales and operations functions in a global project-based firm.”                                      | Information processing model<br>Theory             | Sales and operations functions<br>A different practical context             |
| Eklinder-Frick, Eriksson and Hallén (2014:461)     | “Abandoning wider generalizations of social capital on a community level in favor of a network and actor-centered conceptualization is thus in line with current research within the field.”   | Community level<br>Concept                         | Network and actor level<br>A different level of practical context           |
| Goduscheit (2014:525)                              | “While these studies have addressed the role of the relationship promoter, the unit of analysis has been innovation projects carried out within one particular organization. Hitherto, the role of innovation promoters in inter-organizational innovation projects has not been scrutinised.” | Innovation promoters in an organization<br>Concept | Inter-organizational innovation promoters.<br>A different practical context |
| Purchase, Olaru and Denize (2014:449)              | “Yet, previous research has tended to ignore the network level and focus on resource exchange within dyads or in intra-organizational resource development.”   | Resource exchange in dyads<br>Activity             | Resource exchange in networks<br>A different level of practical context     |



**Table 7**  
Exemplars of assumption challenging research.

| Authors  | Semantics of the contribution claim   | Assumptions being challenged   |
|--|---|--|
| Huang, Cheng and Tseng (2014:455)              | "In order to understand this we must go behind such general patterns of correlations among variables based on cross sectional studies to examine the mechanisms and processes by which they affect each other and how they change and evolve over time."  | Assumptions of cross-sectional studies in quantitative work<br>Field and paradigm problematization   |
| Guette, Matthyssens and Vandenbempt (2014:610) | "Our goal is to challenge fundamental assumptions of our field's dominant discourse in performing research and generating theories for strategic change under real contexts, and redirect attention to a mindful organizing perspective to understand process elements of strategic change that really matter."   | Offers challenge to dominant discourse regarding strategic change drawn from practical, process perspective<br>Root metaphor and paradigm problematization |
| Möller (2013:325)                              | "The paper contributes to the advancement of business marketing theory by offering an enhanced understanding of the nature of current theory by challenging current views on the unifiability of the relationship marketing and business network approaches, and by providing a market versus network-based contingency view."  | Assumptions of incompatibility between relationship and network paradigms and markets versus networks logic<br>In-house problematization                   |
| Friend and Johnson (2014:642)                  | "Research often examines the conceptualization of positive relational attributes which drive positive relational outcomes but generally fails to also take into consideration the negative relational attributes customers perceive when evaluating their existing relationships. Corresponding lines of research argue that knowledge about relationships is problematically unilateral and overly focused on the positive aspects of relationship." | Assumptions that relationships are wholly positive<br>Field problematization   |

### 3.2.2. Revelatory contribution

Revelatory contribution strategies consisted of two main sub-groupings, assumption challenging (Type 1.1) and using multiple lenses (Type 1.2). Using the procedure outlined in Table 2, we coded 106 papers (20%) as containing revelatory contribution strategies, in comparison with 88% of the papers which contained incremental strategies. In terms of the reliance on revelatory strategies, 28 papers (6%) held free-standing revelatory strategies (either Type 1.1 or 1.2). This suggests to us that some Industrial Marketing authors are confident in relying on revelatory contribution strategies and reviewers and editors are confident in handling them as such (although this sample cannot reveal numbers rejected at the peer review stage). Of the two revelatory approaches, 22 of the 28 papers uniquely deployed assumption challenging approaches, while six uniquely deployed multiple lens strategies. Of these 28 free-standing revelatory strategy papers, 21 were empirical papers and 7 were conceptual. Of the remaining six free-standing multiple lens papers, four were empirical and two were conceptual. This suggests that within Industrial Marketing scholarship, the use of multiple literatures in contribution claims is most evident as part of a multiple contribution strategy approach, rather than as a free-standing strategy. Therefore, both sub-strategies of revelatory contribution are apparent in the sample, but authors seeking to make this kind of contribution seem more confident in relying on the assumption challenging sub-strategy as a free-standing strategy, compared to multiple lenses. We will now examine the semantics of these two revelatory strategies in more detail.

**3.2.2.1. Challenging assumptions: problematization.** Similar to the findings in relation to new context gap spotting strategies, the semantics when challenging assumptions were subtle and quite difficult to define. As Johnson (2003) suggests, this strategy is rhetorically interesting, so it is couched in terminology that is often complex. Indicative terms included "contest," "contrast," "challenge," and "alternative." Our approach here was guided by the best practice advice offered by Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011). They discuss how the difficulties in pursuing this contribution strategy are tied up with semantics, particularly in the way an underlying assumption is surfaced and then challenged. We examined these more nuanced attempts to expose underlying assumptions in an attempt to extract exemplars. We present these in Table 7.

From Table 7, we were also able to identify multiple examples of four of the five types of assumption challenging rhetoric outlined by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) (see Table 1), leaving only ideological problematization as unidentified in this study. Further work is needed

to isolate examples of this ideological assumption challenging strategy, or develop the use of this as a novel problematization approach in industrial marketing scholarship. A further finding of this analysis is that revelatory contribution strategies are often claimed in empirical papers and not found exclusively or even dominantly in conceptual papers.

**3.2.2.2. Using multiple lenses.** We find the semantics of using multiple lenses rather easier to identify than is the case for an assumption challenging strategy. Words such as "interdisciplinary", "multi-disciplinary" and "literature synthesis" we associate with a multiple lens contribution strategy. We find this contribution strategy in 53 (11%) of the papers in our sample. However, similar to assumption challenging claims, making claims based on using multiple lenses also contain more nuanced elements. We provide some examples in Table 8, where we also draw upon the theory blending and theory-borrowing classifications discussed in Section 2.2.5 above (Oswick et al., 2011). Most examples involve theory blending with only a small number seemingly attempting theory borrowing.

### 3.2.3. Replicatory contribution strategies

Our intent was to create a conceptual framework and set of procedures based on all types of contribution discussed in the current literature. We found very limited evidence of claims of replication. Of the three sub-classifications of replicatory strategy, we found no claims which we could comfortably classify as exact or close replication. Differentiated replication is discussed as being a variation in conceptual, methodological or substantive domains (Brinberg & McGrath, 1995). In an attempt to define Type 3.3 contribution, we found ourselves debating whether they were in fact Type 2.3 – a new context contribution. We found only 22 examples we initially thought were indicative of a differentiated replication approach, nine of which were relied upon as a free-standing strategy. Only two studies explicitly used the term, "replication", and only one of these referred to "differentiated replication." Other key terms we associated with this contribution strategy were "confirm" and "confirmation." We will return to the similarities between differentiated replication and new context strategies in our conclusions. Table 9 details the exemplars associated with differentiated replication strategies.

### 3.3. Multiple contribution strategies

We have spoken above about free-standing strategies. We also attempted to capture the use of multiple strategy types. Taking our eleven sub-categories as a base, we identified that 260 (53%) of papers

**Table 8**  
Exemplars associated with multiple lens contribution strategies.

| Authors                                 | Semantics of the contribution claim   | Nature of literature combination  |
|---|---|---|
| Andersen and Kragh (2013:82)            | “Combining research on inter-organizational relationships with re-search on creativity seems to offer a potential for fruitful insights into how to tackle the paradoxical challenges involved in managing creativity across boundaries”.   | Blending inter-organizational relationship research with creativity research.<br>Theory blending  |
| Green and Cluley (2014:1344)            | “The contribution of our paper is as follows: theoretically, we relate the discussion of innovation to wider social theories of practice and introduce temporal and cultural dynamics into the account of radical innovation”   | Blending temporal and cultural dynamics to accounts of radical innovation.<br>Theory blending   |
| Czinkota, Kaufmann and Basile (2014:91) | “Our paper innovatively synthesizes and explains a number of conceptual frameworks for improving the overall corporate and supply chain performance to the benefit of society and all stakeholders involved. We link the notions of sustainability, ethical/social responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and supply chain management with the legitimacy, reputation and branding concepts”.  | Theory blending of sustainability, ethical/social responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and supply chain management with the legitimacy, reputation and branding literature.<br>Theory blending |
| Hodgkinson and Healey (2014:1307)       | In this article we draw on the insights of recent advances in the social neurosciences, more specifically neuroeconomics [...] and social cognitive neuroscience [...] to demonstrate why the time has come for a fundamental rethink of the psychological foundations underpinning this body of work as a whole. Departing from the “cold cognition logic” currently prevailing, our alternative account of mental model and behavior change [...] conceives metacognition, emotion management and self-regulation as core dynamic managerial capabilities essential for meeting the behavioral challenges of radical innovation.” | Borrowing of theories from neuroscience to replace prevailing cold cognitions logic with an alternative perspective<br>Theory borrowing   |

contained a single contribution claim, 178 (36%) of papers contained two discernible contribution claims, and 45 (9%) papers claimed 3 contribution types. Only in 5 (1%) papers were four or more contribution types attempted, the most found being five. This finding as to the common use of multiple contribution strategies presents some difficulties in presenting magnitudes of contribution as a simple large-small spectrum.

#### 4. Phase three of the research

In the first two phases, we derived a conceptual framework from *known* contribution strategies and conducted a systematic analysis to explore how strategies were used by industrial marketing scholars. We had three concerns with the methods deployed in phases one and two: first, whether there were further ‘unknown strategies’ outside the framework developed in phase one; second, whether coding in phase two was consistent between the three coders; and third, whether introduction sections truly captured the contributions made in the body of the papers. The purpose of the third confirmatory phase of analysis was to increase our confidence in the findings of phases one and two.

##### 4.1. Phase three methods and findings

To address our concerns about the scope of the framework, we performed three checks, an outlier analysis, a control analysis and a cross-check analysis. We explain each in turn.

###### 4.1.1. Outlier analysis

Throughout phase 2, any papers not immediately classifiable under the categories in Fig. 1 were coded as ‘outliers’. We were unable to classify 50 (9%) of our sample using our standard procedures. These papers were therefore examined in their entirety by a panel of four of the research team. The panel discussed what the contribution strategy of the paper was, based on a substantive reading of the *whole* paper. We found that in five papers, attempts to suggest a revelatory contribution were made either in the literature review or conclusion sections. In 24 papers, an allusion was made to making an incremental contribution in either the literature review or conclusion sections and two papers attempted a differentiated replication contribution. Only two papers pursued a free-standing ‘practical’ problem throughout. However, we note this observation in isolation and will leave it to future research to connect this and explore it further in the rigor-relevance debate. We do,

however, note Hallgren's (2012:810), proposed contribution type where:

“Instead of a distinct research question, the argument is built on a practical need, which seems to warrant an exception from the traditional structure of a paper.”

We remained unclear on the intention of 17 papers. The outlier analysis did not therefore reveal evidence of further strategies falling outside of our 11 sub-categories.

###### 4.1.2. Control sample analysis

A further 5% sample was rechecked to assess whether there was consistency between what the claims were in the introductions against those in the remainder of the paper. We found comfort between the introductions and main bodies of work – in that the claims made in the introduction were not contradicted by comments made in the body of the paper. Neither were additional strategies found that fell outside the 11 sub-categories. However, a further qualitative conclusion derived from this phase is that authors are significantly under-claiming, particularly in papers which were coded as relying on neglect or confusion spotting strategies. Indeed we detected a sense of a conservative approach in the introductions section, with bolder claims being made later in the document that could have been couched in terms of problematization. We find ourselves in agreement with Alvesson and Sandberg (2011:250) – that authors in our sample may be inclined to “downplay or conceal a strong contribution by dressing it up in gap-spotting rhetoric.” In countering the notion of there being a single spectrum of large to small contributions with one of multiple overlapping contribution strategies seems an important point for authors to consider. We propose that authors should routinely consider their works for the possibility of claiming multiple contributions. There also seem to be significant opportunities that have been missed to state contributions along the line of new context or, more pointedly, to claim differentiated replication contributions by the replication of methodological tools in different contexts. In a similar vein, there seemed to be a number of opportunities to claim multiple lens contributions by the use of different bodies of literature. In particular, where these bodies of literature have different underlying assumptions, the value of these assimilations seemed significantly under-emphasized in a small number of papers within the 5% sample.

**Table 9**  
Exemplars associated with differentiated replication strategies.

| Author                                 | Semantics of the contribution claim   | Conceptual          | Methodological      | Substantive                      |
|--|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| McCabe, Stern and Dacko<br>(2013:422)  | "This differentiated replication supports the argument for the use of stochastic modeling techniques in industrial marketing management"<br>"...previous studies have focused on multiple category suppliers to a single focal firm [...]. In contrast, the analysis in this paper presents a study of multiple buyers and suppliers operating in a single category, demonstrating the power of analysis of the macroscopic patterns of behavior to identify and interpret structural changes and the impact of these changes on individual buyer-supplier relationships".<br>"Our data analysis offers supportive evidence for the deterrence logic but with unexpected results. By elaborating on our empirical results, the original assumption of deterrence theory, and the nature of interfirm relationship in marketing channels, we modify the deterrence model for research on power-related behaviors in the given context."<br>"To this end, we conducted a laboratory experiment to examine equal and unequal employee compositions in the post-merger firms while confirming the earlier finding on the negative influence of conflict of organizational cultures on merger outcomes."<br>"The primary objective of our study is to confirm the Quality-Satisfaction-Loyalty (Q-S-L) [...] paradigm in an emerging market context and then identify sources of heterogeneity". | Replication         | Changed             | Attempt to extend generalization |
| Zhuang, Hemdon and Zhou<br>(2014:188)  |   | Slight modification | Replication         | Attempt to extend generalization |
| Oh, Peters and Johnston<br>(2014:1036) |   | Slight modification | Replication         | Attempt to extend generalization |
| Human and Naudé (2014:921).            |   | Replication         | Slight modification | Attempt to extend generalization |

#### 4.1.3. Cross-check analysis between coders

The purpose of this cross-check was to clarify whether there were any discrepancies between the coding between the four researchers who coded the papers in phase Two. Coder 1 therefore checked and re-coded a 5% sample of papers. The process found comfort with all nine of the eleven categories. However, as already mentioned above, some difficulty was encountered in distinguishing the semantics between new context (Type 2.3) and differentiated replication (Type 3.3). We could agree a contradistinction between all other sub-categories, but not between these two. Put differently, there was agreement that it was one or the other, but disagreement as to which of the two (Type 2.3 or Type 3.3). We are therefore confident that we have identified the semantics identified with nine of the eleven categories and a tenth we have referred to in Fig. 3 as a differentiated context meta-strategy (Type 5). There seems some potential here for authors to better define the language needed to communicate this strategy. We mark type 2.3 and 3.3 contributions in strikethrough to show that while they may emerge as distinctive with further use, they did not do so in our study. Given the doubts expressed by some editors as to the veracity of a free-standing new context strategy (see for instance, Hazen, 2016), authors may be advised to couch this approach in terms of differentiated replication. Our solution is therefore to offer a revised model (Fig. 3) with confidence in nine sub-strategies and caution with regard to two.

In completing the confidence checks in phase 3, we find the model to be secure in respect of there being no further categories in the sampled papers that we failed to identify, and that an analysis of introductions and abstracts really did capture the contributions made in the body of the papers in the sample. We further identify some under-claiming by authors. We do, however suggest some caution with regard to the distinction between sub-categories 2.3 and 3.3 and suggest further development of this approach couched in semantic terms associated with differentiated replication. We therefore show these categories in our final conceptual framework as merged.

## 5. Conclusions and future research directions

### 5.1. Our contribution on contributions

Our broad aims for this paper were twofold. First, we sought to develop an analytically generalizable framework for examining the intentional contribution strategies of authors in any discipline and to deploy it to present specific conclusions for industrial marketing scholarship. The second aim was to provide exemplars of the rhetorical acts of authors in this discipline as a guide to future scholarship in any discipline.

Broadly, we can confirm the use of contribution strategies described in the literature reviewed in phase 1 of the survey and presented in Section 2. For each of these strategies, we have identified and presented the semantics associated with the strategy. We feel this will be a help to future scholars in elucidating these strategies. Our findings confirm the dominance of incremental strategies, both when combined with other strategies or as a free-standing strategy. We note, however, some confidence in framing and relying on revelatory approaches. Four of the five types of assumption challenging strategies suggested by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) are identified and presented in Table 1. We suggest that the references from the literature reviewed in section 3 could be referred to and could be cited explicitly when using these strategies, particularly when using non-incremental approaches. This approach offers a clear communication to reviewers of the intent in a paper. Where we found discomfort was in the distinction between differentiated replication strategies and new context strategies. The confusion that lay between the coders was due to the nature of the extended or replicated 'thing'. What this has suggested to us is that while these strategies are being used, and relied upon distinctively in a number of papers, the semantics of their use are not clear and consistent within this group of scholars. The word 'replication', barely appeared in the



Fig. 3. Final conceptual framework.

sample, and given our failure to code a single case of close or exact replication, there seems a significant opportunity for industrial marketing scholars to pursue this strategy – given support from editors and reviewers. In Table 9 we offered an analysis of these semantics using Brinberg and McGrath's (1995) framework and offer this as an approach to better communicating what we have chosen to call *differentiated context* contributions. Where this has been used as a free-standing strategy in the sample, the substantive domain has been more than a geographic extension of a survey. Geographic extensions, it seemed, are combined with other strategies.

We also find evidence to suggest that authors could be braver in claiming multiple contributions in a paper, rather than looking for (as many authors seemed to have been doing) a single claim of contribution. This seems particularly true where incremental strategies are relied upon and in phase 3 of the survey, there seemed to us to be opportunities to claim replicatory contributions in terms of methods and research tools. Equally, there also seemed to be a number of missed opportunities to claim multiple strategy contributions, particularly where these bodies of literature are of some distance from each other in terms of underlying assumptions.

We propose that the framework developed in this paper will be of interest to authors in any discipline, however, given that this paper both develops and tests the framework, no comparator test is currently available against which to apply the specific results from industrial marketing to another discipline or sub-discipline. In time, we expect that interesting comparisons of different contribution strategies between disciplines could be made.

## 5.2. Practical contributions

The contribution made in this paper can best be appreciated by first understanding who are the potential beneficiaries of that contribution. Value would seem to accrue to several practitioner groups.

First and foremost, the paper will be useful for the authors of academic work, both journal authors and doctoral candidates (Ladik & Stewart, 2008). A deep explication of options in making a contribution and the rhetorical acts associated with each strategy can only aid the intellectual objectives of such academic stakeholder groups, and the instrumental objectives of having their work accepted for publication.

Second, to reviewers and examiners of intellectual output – a coherent view of contribution strategies can only aid the judicious assessment of academic work. A concern of the authors in conceiving this paper was a perception that the only safe contribution strategy was an incremental, gap-spotting approach. We offer significant challenge to this assumption in this paper. We offer an approach to address Barney's (2018) concern that the review process may be less than optimal if editors and reviewers do not orientate themselves towards a normal science or revelatory science paper early in their engagement with that paper. We offer a means through which authors can better flag the position of their paper to editors and reviewers early in their article.

Third, to journal editors – an understanding of the collective strategies of an author group, having been filtered through a review board and when compared to other journals would offer valuable insight into the relative intellectual trajectory of a journal, for instance, in relying too little or too much on certain types of contribution. Comparisons between journals using the framework in this paper would greatly aid this endeavour.



### 5.3. Limitations and future research directions

We suggest that while the framework proposed in this paper offers a significant step in understanding the deliberate contribution strategies of scholars, a significant agenda remains to be pursued. First, without a discipline-to-discipline comparison, it is difficult to draw conclusions about any single discipline's deployment of certain strategies. We call for the close replication of the framework in other disciplinary areas, and subsequent meta-analysis to establish the progress of scientific contributions across broader parent disciplines. Such analysis undertaken journal-by-journal may also offer guidance for journal editors and may offer insight into which journals are furthering the most revelatory thought.

Second, through this replication process, the model's analytic generalizability should be tested to add further discreet strategies to the model, if identified. We anticipate, however, that these will be sub-strategies within the four meta-strategies proposed in Figs. 1 and 2 and that the main strategies in the model will remain sound.

Third, we have focused in this paper on the deliberate contribution strategies of scholars in their authorship and have avoided any post-rationalizations of impact after publication. However, a further extension of the model could be made by examining an older sample of papers relative to measure of impact, such as citation counts, reads, downloads etc. In this way, the relative impact of different contribution strategies could be assessed. Explicit larger or smaller contribution assumptions, such as those contained in the spectrum of contributions offered by Ladik and Stewart (2008) may then be exposed to scrutiny. However, we anticipate that a simple spectrum will not be possible to define as the preponderance of multiple strategy types in a single paper has been firmly established in this article. In this sense we suggest that from hereon, contribution strategies should be considered as having dimensions rather than levels.

Fourth, we propose that a sample of *rejected* papers could be exposed to the same process of analysis as outlined in this paper so that a complete picture of unsuccessful strategies, successful strategies relative to publication, and successful strategies relative to impact can be gleaned. A fascinating conclusion would be to confirm or contradict Hunt's (1994) stated fear that scholars making big contributions risk rejection. To our knowledge, no study has yet looked at the contribution strategies used in rejected papers. Fifth, as we have chosen not to focus on practical contributions, further work may be able to associate the nature of practical contributions alongside the intent to make specific theoretical contributions. We offer a final methodological caution as to the effects of changes in the editorship of journals. We are fortunate in our sample that the editors have held their posts for a considerable length of time. In other extensions of the framework, sample selection to control rotations of editors may need due consideration so as to allow for changes of approach to the review process.

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